

VZCZCXRO2713
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHCO #0241 1561025
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 051025Z JUN 09 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0959
INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1457
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS COTONOU 000241

PARIS FOR ARS (DWINTON)
DEPARTMENT FOR AF/PD (ANYASO, TITUS, LISEBY), AF/W (ACOOK)

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: BENIN GPRA REPORT: TRANSPARENCY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE PROGRAM
REPORT

REF: SECSTATE 012205

11. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY: Benin's participants in the March 16-April 3, 2009 Transparency and Good Governance Program, Dr. Eric Adja, Communication Assistant and Technical Advisor at the Presidency of Benin Republic and Evelle Gomez, Head of Debt Collection and Prosecution at the "Agence Judiciaire du Tresor," returned to Benin and debriefed the Public Affairs Officer, the Cultural Affairs Assistant and the Program Support Assistant about their visit. Both were very satisfied with the program and promised to share with their office colleagues and the Government of Benin the insights, knowledge and perceptions they gained during the program in the U.S.

12. DATE OF ACTIVITY: March 16-April 3, 2009; second and third quarter, FY 09.

13. PROGRAM JUSTIFICATION/OBJECTIVES: The program was a good opportunity for both participants to explore the role of citizens, the media, and civil society in fostering transparency and good governance and this enhanced their understanding of the U.S. system of ethics and accountability in government.

14. MPP UMBRELLA THEMES AND AUDIENCE REACHED: Subject program meets Post's objectives in Democracy and Good Governance, Human Rights and Mutual Understanding.

15. ACTIVITIES/IMPACT/RESULT: During the debriefing session, both participants said they were impressed by America's strong democracy which, according to them, is essentially based on three pillars: (1) the Constitution, which is highly respected and clearly defines the roles and rights of the citizens, the Executive Branch and the legislative and judicial branches of government, (2) a free press and (3) a strong, active and volunteering civil society.

In his interview publicized at America.gov, Eric Adja said that he "felt privileged to be chosen to learn not only how the U.S. government deals with good governance, ethics and transparency but also to find out more about America." The U.S. experience revealed to the participants the challenges facing Benin before it can expect to reach a similar level of good governance. They commiserated that there is still a lot of hard work that needs to be done to support President Yayi Boni's efforts to combat corruption and change Beninese habits and mentality. Both Adja and Gomez are, nevertheless, optimistic that changes can be made. They reasoned that by taking steps to raise salaries and Beninese living standards, improve education, combat corruption and raise the awareness among young people of the need for public accountability in government and business, democracy in Benin (which is still young) can be improved. This means that there needs to be a strict application of the laws and sanctions must be imposed against those who have been convicted of corruption, which is not now the case. "The main lesson I have learned from the various presentations is that good governance is not just a moral recipe, but is a win-win process, which profits both people and their leaders, whereas corruption profits only a limited category of people," Eric Adja said in his interview.

¶6. As an immediate result of their participation in this program, Gomez organized a lessons-learned workshop with his colleagues at the "Agence Judiciaire du Tresor," and Adja is preparing an official report to the Government and planning to organize a youth seminar for leadership training, in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy's Public Diplomacy section. Both IV participants will lead this workshop for the members of the National Youth Organization, an organization comprised of all the youth associations across the country. Eric Adja heads this organization and is assisted by a board of 15 members. In spite of the entrenched mentality of corruption among the older generation, Gomez and Adja are hopeful that by working with the youth to change this mentality and to increase their sense of personal responsibility in working for the good of the country, they can foster improvements in the country and promote a stable democracy.

¶6. The participants found the program to be well organized and tightly focused. Nonetheless they wished there could have been a moderator for the debates after the presentations to give the participants the equal opportunity to ask questions.

¶7. NON-USG SOURCES OF IN-COUNTRY FUNDING/IN KIND SUPPORT: None

¶8. QUALITY OF USG SUPPORT: Excellent. The participants were very impressed by the quality and professionalism of the speakers, ELOs and programs.

RAWLINGS